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SUBJECT: PAMFILOVA EXPECTS GREATER RESONANCE WITH MEDVEDEV
ON CIVIL SOCIETY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: MOSCOW 370

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle; reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ella Pamfilova, recently re-appointed by Medvedev as the head of the Presidential Council on Promoting the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights, admitted on March 4 that the Council had not been very successful during the last year of Putin's presidency, but was optimistic that Medvedev would view its work differently. She said that unlike the Office of the Ombudsman and the Public Chamber, the Council was independent of the rest of the government and its job was to advise Medvedev. She expects that she will meet with Medvedev every two months, and that he will meet with the entire Council, whose members include some harsh government critics, no less than twice a year. Pamfilova looks forward to improved relations between Russia and the U.S., and believes that current economic crisis may give Russian citizens the impetus to ask for a voice in how they are governed. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On March 4 Ambassador Beyrle met with Ella Pamfilova, re-appointed by Medvedev February 10 as head of the Presidential Council on Promoting the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights (reftel). Pamfilova was first appointed to this position in November 2004 by Putin. Prior to this she had served as the chair of the President's Human Rights Commission created in 2002 and runs her own human rights NGO "For Civil Dignity" that focuses on children's issues.

The Council's Final Year Under Putin Not "Successful"

¶3. (C) In a surprisingly candid admission, Pamfilova said that the last year of the Council's work under Putin was not very successful, after which she felt she no longer wanted to continue as its head. She explained that in mid-2007 the Council had developed a plan for observing the upcoming December 2007 State Duma elections that received a cold response from the Kremlin. Despite this, after Putin asked she agreed to stay on and work with Medvedev because she had a good working relationship with him when he was Chief of Staff at the Presidential Administration. She added that while he was Chief of Staff, Medvedev struck her as a very smart man who knew not only his job, but also what other people on the staff were doing. She recalled that she and the Council were more effective while Medvedev was Putin's Chief of Staff, during which time he often asked her opinion on different subjects.

¶4. (C) Despite her and the Council's undefined status during the first nine months of Medvedev's presidency, she decided to weigh in after the government proposed a new stricter law on espionage in December 2008. Pamfilova said that she wrote a letter to Medvedev as head of the Council questioning the law, even though an earlier letter from Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin had already been rebuffed. To her

shock, she continued, Medvedev said that he agreed with her and asked that the proposed law be taken back for reworking by the Presidential Administration. She believed that any new law passed by the Duma will take into account her concerns. She has also discussed with Medvedev her and the Council's opposition to restrictions on non-governmental organizations, one of which she still heads. She said the Council is interested in the implementation of Putin's Decree 485 from June 2008 that provided that grants from foreign sources will be taxed to the Russian NGO recipient unless the foreign organization is included on a list of exempt organizations. She joked that as the heads of NGOs, she and several members of the Council are the "fifth column" that receives foreign funding about which Putin often speaks.

Pamfilova Approves of the "New Look" of the Council

¶ 15. (C) Pamfilova took pains to separate the work of the Council from that of the Office of the Ombudsman and the Public Chamber, institutions she felt were part of the government. The Ombudsman's office was like a legal institution, whereas the Council's job is to provide advice to the President. She said that her job is unpaid, although the Presidential Administration does provide the Council incidentals like small, but prime office space on Novaya Ploshad (she said the Council has a largely volunteer staff), a car and money to hold conferences. She denied she was an government official ("chinovnik") because she is not subordinate to anyone. She said she saw herself as head of the Council, not as a human rights advocate, but nonetheless a conduit (perhaps the only one) through which the Council's

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members, who she described as more interested in Russia's democratic development than those people on the Public Chamber, could get their points across to the government. While she only met with Putin every quarter, she said that on February 10 Medvedev agreed that they would meet every two months ("and more often, if necessary") and that he would meet with the entire 36-member Council no less than twice a year. She admitted that access to Medvedev will be key to the success of the Council.

¶ 16. (C) She noted that, given Medvedev's professionalism, she will insist that proposals made to him must be of the highest quality. She added that the initial topics that the Council will discuss during its first full session on April 10 will be new legislation governing NGOs, restrictions on meetings and demonstrations, and mass media. She also expects that with the addition of Kiril Kabanov from the NGO National Anticorruption Committee, and Yelena Panfilova from Transparency International's Moscow office to the Council, that anticorruption will also take center stage. She said she was buoyed by Medvedev's recent statement during an official visit to Spain that he expected the Council to criticize the government, but added that she would have the Council start "softly" so that it could have greater success later.

Possible Movement on Greater Democratization, Human Rights

¶ 17. (C) Pamfilova ventured that one possible effect of the current economic crisis could be that Russian citizens will ask for a greater role in how they are governed. She noted that because of the crisis, Russians may believe less in the national superiority complex that they had come to believe under Putin and will see themselves as part of the rest of the world that is suffering through the current global crisis. She added that part of the reason for her support for liberal democrats is that they have good values that should be passed on to future generations. Ambassador Beyrle noted a recent discouraging poll in which only eight percent of Russians said they believed they could influence the political process. Pamfilova said that people need to change

the way they see themselves and their government; without this, the people will not ask for better governance. She noted that the crisis has already seen the rise of the "avtomobilisti" movement initially as a reaction to a economic problem, but that it has made people question how the government makes decisions.

18. (C) Another issue on which she thinks the Russian government may change its position is Protocol 14 of the Council of Europe dealing with the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg. Pamfilova said that the Russian government has not supported Protocol 14 for several reasons, especially since they do not see anything in it for them. Pamfilova explained that in addition to the fear of the added ease with which Russian citizens could appeal directly to the ECHR, the Russian government does not feel that their fellow Europeans will "like us any more" if they agree to the Protocol and Russian citizens themselves have not asked their own government to accede to it. Pamfilova hoped that if this began to matter more to the people, the government might be convinced to change its stance on the COE's Protocol 14.

Pamfilova Welcomes "Reset" in Russian-U.S. Relations

19. (C) Pamfilova said that after the effects of the August 2008 conflict with Georgia on Russian-U.S. relations, she is hoping for an improvement. She added that Lukin had invited her to participate in the next session of the dialogue between the Ombudsman's office and the Carnegie Endowment to be held in Washington this spring; she doubted she could attend because of the Council's start-up commitments, but agreed to try to visit the U.S. this year. She remembers meeting with Secretary Clinton during one of the Secretary's visits to Moscow as First Lady during the 1990's.

Comment

110. (C) Pamfilova is candid, direct, and dynamic, all essential qualities to move the civil society, human rights and democratization portfolio forward in Russia. She is greatly respected within the human rights community for her history of forthright criticism of the Russian government's actions in Chechnya. In Medvedev, she believes she may have an interlocutor who is more willing to take into account the interests of the Council. While circumspect in her comments,

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she clearly sees a real distinction between him and Putin on these issues.

BEYRLE